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ABSTRACT

The Regional Educational Laboratory Program is the U.S. Department of Education's largest research and development investment. Administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), the network of 10 Regional Labs works to ensure that those involved in educational improvement at the local, state, and regional levels have access to the best available research and knowledge from practice. This handbook describes each Laboratory's mission and major activities and describes overall program goals, including how they serve their regions and network on a national basis. Information on how to contact the Laboratory or the OERI program officer for that Laboratory is provided. A map depicting the region that each Laboratory serves is included. (LMI)

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Profiles of the Regional Educational Laboratories

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IMPROVEMENT

U.S. Department of Education
Richard W. Riley
Secretary

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
Sharon P. Robinson
Assistant Secretary

Office of Reform Assistance and Dissemination
Ronald W. Cartwright
Acting Director

September 1996

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Foreword

The Regional Educational Laboratory Program is one the largest investments in field-based research and development that the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) supports. For the next five years, the ten Laboratories—under the guidance of their own regional governing boards—will be concentrating their efforts on supporting broad-based, comprehensive educational change to ensure high academic achievement for all students. To attain this ambitious goal, Laboratories have established core programs designed to combine components of education reform into a systemic whole and to test and demonstrate how such successful efforts can find widespread application.

We envision the Regional Educational Laboratories as partners with teachers and administrators, other assistance providers, and with researchers working in OERI's Centers and Institutes as they jointly plan a program of research and development to tackle the most difficult educational problems facing our teachers and students. Laboratories develop products and programs of the highest quality and demonstrate their applications in hundreds of schools and school districts, including some of the poorest urban and rural areas with high concentrations or percentages of disadvantaged students. These schools are the proving grounds for exploring effective ways to implement educational reform and to ensure that all students and teachers benefit from these efforts.

This handbook describes each Laboratory's mission and major activities, provides information on how to contact the Laboratory (a map depicting the region each Laboratory serves is included) or the OERI program officer for that Laboratory. If you are an educator facing the difficult challenges of school improvement, or if you are a teacher, parent, or community member interested in knowing what research says about successful educational reform, we hope you take every advantage of the services and the information the Laboratory in your region can provide.

Sharon P. Robinson
Assistant Secretary
Office of Educational Research and Improvement

Contents

Foreword iii

Introduction to the Regional Educational Laboratory Program 1

Northeast and Islands Laboratory at Brown University (LAB) 3

Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) 7

Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) 11

Southeastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) 13

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) 17

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) 19

Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL) 21

WestEd 23

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) 25

Pacific Region Educational Laboratory (PREL) 27

Regional Educational Laboratory Map: 1995–2000 29

Introduction to the Regional Educational Laboratory Program

The Regional Educational Laboratory Program (the "Lab Program") is the U.S. Department of Education's largest research and development investment designed to help educators, policymakers, and communities improve schools and help all students attain their full potential. Administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), the network of 10 Regional Labs works to ensure that those involved in educational improvement at the local, state, and regional levels have access to the best available research and knowledge from practice. The Labs also want to ensure that information about exemplary and promising programs as well as other important lessons about school reform developed or learned in one site can be appropriately applied elsewhere.

Background

Congress initiated the Lab Program in 1965 as part of the landmark Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which addressed the educational system's failure to provide all students with high-quality instruction and achieve high levels of performance. The Act also provided financial support for school districts and states for additional staff, educational materials and resources, and capacity building. It also created a system of Regional Labs to develop and disseminate, in cooperation with schools, state education agencies, and research universities, ideas and programs for improving educational practices throughout the country. In 1965, U.S. Commissioner of Education Francis Keppel described his vision of Regional Labs in testimony to the House General Subcommittee on Education:

The proposed system of large-scale regional educational laboratories would provide the funds and the setting for (conducting) research, for (articulating) the results of research into forms that can be used in classrooms, for continuous testing of these forms, for the training of teachers in their use, and for making them available to local systems.

In 1994, the Regional Laboratory Program was reauthorized (Public Law 103-227) with the mission "to promote knowledge-based school improvement to help all students meet high standards and to help the nation meet the National Education Goals."

Labs Serve Their Regions

Each Regional Lab is guided by a governing board that represents the constituents in its region—including teachers, researchers, and high-level policymakers. Under the guidance of their boards, Laboratories:

- work with states and localities to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies by providing information, training and technical assistance, and developing or implementing research-based programs;
- conduct development and applied research resulting in well-tested models for implementing systemic reform and for "scaling up" or expanding exemplary isolated reform efforts on a broader scale;
- promote widespread access to information regarding research and best practice;
- create communities of learners to engage collaboratively with the Laboratory in development and dissemination;
- cooperate with other ED-funded technical assistance providers to create a nationwide education information and assistance system that can support educators' and policy makers' efforts to improve educatiuon; and
- forge strong links to the research community to promote the creation of new knowledge to improve education.

Laboratories are expected to pay particular attention to rural areas and to districts and schools that serve high concentrations of economically disadvantaged students.

Labs Serve the Nation

The Regional Labs also work as a network, using their knowledge, experience, and expertise to develop and deliver products and services benefiting educators nationally. During the past five years, the Regional Laboratory Network succeeded at:

- bringing together curriculum framework developers in math and science from 22 states to design ways to help those in other states with similar responsibilities;
- promoting the case method as a tool to help teachers improve their skills by teaching teachers how to prepare case studies, training teachers in the use of the case method for pre-service and in-service instruction, and disseminating casebooks to thousands of educators nationwide;
- validating Laboratory-developed products and processes that have helped schools and enabled other Laboratories to provide technical assistance to spread these practices nationwide; and
- helping to identify or develop resources on critical issues facing urban education and making those resources available to teachers on the Internet.

Priorities for the Next Five Years

During the next five years Laboratories will work with hundreds of schools and school districts, as well as states, research institutions and community-based organizations, to explore effective ways to implement educational reforms. Two priorities will guide all Laboratory program work:

- helping educators and administrators to "put the pieces of educational improvement together" systemically to achieve educational excellence and equity for all students; and
- helping educators and administrators to expand systemic reform to benefit schools, and the educational programs within them, in all communities.

Each Laboratory has also been asked to develop one expertise as a *specialty area*. This will enable Laboratories to provide leadership and act as an expert resource both within their respective regions and to the Laboratory network. In addition, the specialty areas are aligned with dominant themes of the OERI Research Institutes and the national Research Centers they support to encourage strong links between the creation and use of knowledge.

Conclusion

Thirty years after their creation, the Regional Labs continue to be vital partners with state and local educators, researchers, and policymakers in using research to tackle the difficult issues in education reform. Fulfilling this mission is of critical interest to the nation, as opinion polls consistently show that the need to improve education is one of the highest priorities of the American people. Although there are no panaceas in education, the cumulative work of the Regional Labs over three decades has resulted in many well-tested programs and approaches that can make a measurable difference in improving education.

For more information about the Regional Educational Laboratory Program please contact either:

Robert Stonehill
Director, State and Local Support Division
Phone: (202) 219-2088
Fax: (202) 219-2106
Internet: rstonehi@inet.ed.gov

Carol Chelemer
Team Leader, Regional Educational Laboratory Program
Phone: (202) 219-2235
Fax: (202) 219-2106
Internet: cchelemе@inet.ed.gov

Northeast and Islands Laboratory at Brown University (LAB)

Address:	222 Richmond Street, Suite 300 Providence, RI 02903-4226 Phone: (401) 274-9548 Fax: (401) 421-7650 (800) 521-9550 E-mail: LAB@brown.edu Internet: http://www.lab.brown.edu
Director:	Dr. Mary Lee Fitzgerald
Lab Consortium Site:	Hunter College 695 Park Avenue, 10th Floor West Wing New York, NY 10021 Phone: (212) 772-4648 Fax: (212) 650-3464
OERI Contact:	Lynn Spencer (202) 219-2179; lynn_spencer@ed.gov
States Served:	Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands

FY 1996 Funding: $6.1 million

Mission. To promote knowledge-based school improvement throughout the Northeast and Islands region that helps create equal access to high-quality learning environments for all students, helps all students meet high standards of learning, and helps the nation achieve the vision set forth in the National Education Goals. Specifically, the LAB will work collaboratively to effect systemic reform and to emphasize the need to incorporate equity into all phases of the reform movement.

Partners. Brown University's Education Alliance for Equity and Excellence; Hunter College, City University of New York; Abt Associates; Bolt, Beranek and Newman; Center for Applied Linguistics; Center for Resource Management; Jobs for the Future; RMC Research Corp.; Super Teams; TERC; the University of Massachusetts/Boston; and the Superintendents' Leadership Council

Applied Research and Development. The role of the LAB is to provide ways for everyone involved in the region's school reform to reach commonly acceptable solutions. The LAB works with state departments of education (SEAs), public and private service agencies, community groups, professional associations and others to help them improve their ability to share and adapt exemplary strategies with local educators. The LAB will focus attention on assistance, development, and applied research strategies in three Zones of Inquiry. These Zones include: transforming teaching and learning to ensure that all students learn at high levels; creating school environments and structures that support opportunities to learn; and building partnerships that support systemic reform. The LAB's collaborative inquiry approach to research within each Zone will involve all participants in becoming a community of learners. The collaborative inquiry approach is an applied pedagogical endeavor that enables participants to situate their issues within specific contexts in order to better understand broader reform initiatives. Teams will provide insight on how schools should be changed to meet the needs of today's diverse populations. The LAB also will apply cross-cutting themes—policy, equity, professional development and leadership, and technology—to help states and local districts integrate the components of reform.

Specifically, the LAB's approach:

- helps create a collaborative research agenda that extends beyond any one institution, stakeholder group, or level in the education system;
- addresses issues faced by educators seeking to create better learning environments for children—by bringing together existing research and best practices, generating new knowledge, creating a dissemination process that grows out of the inquiry process, and creating capacity for sustaining change;
- encourages the school district and SEA staff to be actively engaged in the research and development work that the LAB does in schools;
- conducts collaborative research in school settings, helps build knowledge in those settings, and connects with existing networks to expand the community involved in creating and using knowledge; and
- produces practical and useful products.

In conducting its research and development work, the LAB has a direct impact on schools by:

- providing teachers with more effective curricula and strategies for meeting the needs of diverse children;
- working with teachers and parents to support students, especially those from language minority, urban, and disadvantaged backgrounds;
- providing professional development and reflection time for teachers, principals, and superintendents so they can build consensus around specific reform initiatives;
- developing partnerships with parents, business, and community agencies to understand and support school improvement efforts;
- creating new environments and support systems that help students learn in non-traditional settings;
- forecasting what students and teachers will need to succeed in the 21st century so that new models for teaching and learning can be adapted;
- building coherence out of policy, program, and funding initiatives that are often fragmented, one-dimensional and inimical to systemic reform;
- assessing and promoting better use of technology in the region's schools; and
- keeping communication simple, direct, and jargon-free.

Policy and Information Center. A highlight of the LAB is its Policy and Information Center, which has two essential functions:

- identifying, formulating, and circulating policies required to move systemic reform regionally and nationally; and
- targeting the dissemination of appropriate and timely information to clients.

The policy arm of the LAB draws from the research of the laboratory network and others to identify legislation, guidelines, and procedures that promote permanent school change. Policy fellows, from diverse educational settings, will contribute their expertise to the process.

Specialty Area: Language and Cultural Diversity. The LAB is exploring strategies that create new understandings about language and culturally diverse students, and build upon, adapt, and assess successful approaching to meet their needs. This is being accomplished through applied research resulting in products and strategies that develop the capacities of districts to engage diverse students and their families. The LAB's specialty area programs will:

- provide challenging content area materials and strategies for language minority students;
- test alternative assessment practices for determining language competence and content area knowledge of minority students;

- involve culturally diverse parents and communities in the education of their children;
- meet the needs of linguistic minorities by identifying and collaborating on long-term specialized staff development initiatives;
- disseminate and promote promising programs for diverse students;
- develop leadership programs for all levels of school staff around issues of equity and reform; and
- engage superintendents in applying relevant research findings to their own school systems.

Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success (LSS)

Address:	Temple University/Center for Research in Human Development and Education 933 Ritter Annex, 13th St. and Cecil B. Moore Ave. Philadelphia, PA 19122 Phone: (215) 204-3030 Fax: (215) 204-5130 (800) 892-5550 E-mail: lss@vm.temple.edu Internet: http://www.temple.edu/departments/lss
Director:	Dr. Margaret C. Wang
OERI Contact:	Greg Dennis (202) 219-1919; gdennis@inet.ed.gov
States Served:	Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Washington, DC

LSS Regional Offices

Dr. Patricia Gennari, Manager
Western Pennsylvania CRES
Penn Hills School District/IUP
309 Collins Drive
Pittsburgh, PA 15235
Phone: (412) 793-7000 Ext. 223 Fax: (412) 793-6402
E-mail: tgennari@aol.com

Dr. Donald Leake, Manager
Trenton CRES
Trenton State College
367 Forcina Hall
Trenton, NJ 08650
Phone: (609) 771-2229 Fax: (609) 771-2583
E-mail: leake@trenton.edu

Ms. Jane Oates, Manager
Cross-State CRES
Temple University Center for Research
in Human Development and Education
989 Ritter Hall Annex (004-00)
Philadelphia, PA 19122
Phone: (215) 204-4529 Fax: (215) 204-5130
E-mail: jane@vm.temple.edu

Dr. Vernon Polite, Manager
Washington, DC CRES
The Catholic University of America
7486 Sea Change
Columbia, MD 21045
Phone: (202) 319-5655/56 Fax: (202) 319-5657
E-mail: vpolite@ix.netcom.com

FY 1996 Funding: $5.2 million

Mission. To play a pivotal role in revitalizing and reforming education throughout the mid-Atlantic region by improving the region's capacity to bring lasting improvements in the learning of its increasingly diverse student population. The LSS will assist in what in the past has proven difficult: transforming research-based knowledge into useful tools that can be integrated into the educational reform process both within the region and nationally. Likewise, the work of the LSS will be continuously refined based on feedback from the field on what is working and what is needed. The ultimate goal of the LSS is a system that connects schools, parents, community agencies, professional groups, and higher education institutions and that gradually expands reform efforts in the region and is part of a high-tech national system for exchanging information.

Partners. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Catholic University of America, Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), National Urban Coalition, Penn Hills School District (PA) and Trenton (NJ) State College.

Applied Research and Development. The mission of LLS is to help state education agencies and local schools implement systemic reforms that are based on the best information available about education and encourage resiliency and high achievement among all students including those who are disadvantaged and at risk of school failure. Toward this end, an interdisciplinary team of LSS researchers and field-based professionals engage in a program of research, development, dissemination, and application that is not only sensitive to educational practice, but also results in products, program models, and exemplary strategies that are usable in a range of educational settings and suitable for dissemination and application.

The LSS researchers with expertise in bilingual education, economics, educational psychology, instructional technology, public policy, sociology, and politics of education focus on a broad program of research and development that aims to:

- identify effective educational practices and policies that are currently in use;
- develop new strategies for effective classroom instruction;
- design and implement caring school environments that encourage resiliency among students in a variety of circumstances that place them at risk of school failure; and
- demonstrate the feasibility and effectiveness of a coherent and coordinated system of delivering services that connects families, schools, and communities in systemic ways to serve children and youth.

Specialty Area: Urban Education. In integration with its other ongoing work, the LSS develops and implements an urban education enhancement program. This program of applied research and development is carried out in collaboration with the Regional Educational Laboratory System and focuses on building this nation's capacity for fostering educational resilience and learning success of children and youth in urban schools with concentrations of students in a variety of circumstances that place them at work of school failure.

A key program initiative under the Urban Education Enhancement Program is the Learning City Program (LCP), a broad school-family-community approach to improving the educational attainment of urban children and youth. LCP was originally developed based on research conducted at the OERI-supported National Center on Education in the Inner Cities at Temple University. Findings to date show that students in LCP schools, compared with non-LCP schools, tend to feel positive about their classroom and school environments, have higher aspirations for learning and better academic self-concepts. They also feel they are receiving constructive feedback from teachers about their work and behavior and more clearly understand the rules of behavior. Data also show improvements in math and reading scores

and that LCP students outperformed comparison school students in both subjects. Furthermore, when components of the LCP are well implemented, families and the community become increasingly active in a wide range of school activities and in making decisions.

LSS Services to the Field Unit. The LSS includes a Services to the Field Unit, which has developed three innovative strategies to help those it serves. First, it has established a network of Councils for Regional Extension Services (CRESs) in strategic locations across the region. The CRESs serve as local hubs for maintaining highly accessible information services, technical assistance, and training resources for the mid-Atlantic region. Four CRESs are in operation: the Washington, D.C., CRES, housed at the Catholic University of America; the Penn Hills CRES, at the Penn Hills School District in western Pennsylvania; the Trenton CRES, at Trenton State College in New Jersey; and the Cross-State CRES, at LSS headquarters at Temple University.

Second, the unit has developed a field services strategy that links the LSS to existing systems of dissemination and professional development resources, such as professional organizations at national and regional levels. The LSS's Mid-Atlantic Network of Professional Organizations, for example, which is spearheaded by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), is an LSS program that aimed at uniting the region's professional organizations involved in preservice and inservice professional development to provide useful information to practitioners. The Network relies on its member organizations to reach their grassroots members.

Third, the LSS engages in collaborative research with practitioners throughout the region. This part of the Services to the Field Unit enables front-line professionals and researchers to work together to develop, implement, and evaluate research-based strategies that significantly improve student learning. These collaborators conduct field-based trials of innovative, locally initiated reform efforts and serve as demonstration sites of research-based innovations that work.

Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL)

Address:	Post Office Box 1348 Charleston, WV 25325-1348 Phone: (304) 347-0400 Fax: (304) 347-0487 (800) 624-9120 E-mail: aelinfo@ael.org Internet: http://www.ael.org
Director:	Dr. Terry L. Eidell
OERI Contact:	Luna Levinson (202) 219-2138; luna_levinson@ed.gov
States Served:	Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia

FY 1996 Funding: $4.1 million

Mission. To link the knowledge from research with the wisdom from practice to improve teaching and learning. This is accomplished through working with educators, researchers, policymakers, business leaders, families, students, and others to discover, develop, evaluate, and disseminate innovative services, products, and practices.

Applied Research and Development. AEL involves its Board of Directors and educators across the region in identifying, planning and carrying out the work of the Laboratory. The applied research and development activities of AEL reflect this involvement. In each state, AEL is conducting a research and development project, jointly designed with state education leaders, to complement state reform initiatives. In Kentucky, the study looks at student writing portfolios. The project initially involves low SES schools where student writing scores have shown steady improvement in the new performance-based statewide testing program. Over time, the project will expand to include less successful schools, with the intent to jointly develop tools that teachers can use to help raise all students' scores to a high level. In Tennessee, the AEL study is designed to increase the knowledge-base concerning ways to make the Internet a part of meaningful instruction in classrooms. The project relies on the best practices of a group of exemplary teachers known to effectively integrate the Internet with instruction. Documentation of their practices will inform the design and testing of professional development processes and materials for use with others.

The changing role of departments of education across the country—from monitoring to providing support and assistance—is the stimulus for the Virginia study. AEL and the Virginia State Department of Education are working together to develop and test a system the state can use to provide school divisions with technical assistance that supports the academic achievement of all students, especially those in high-need schools. In West Virginia, AEL is working with district- and school-level staffs to develop model examples of ways that data available on the new statewide computer-based education information system can be used to inform instructional decisions.

In addition to these state projects, AEL conducts other applied research and development work. A project called Quest for Inquiry Learning involves school personnel from across the region in developing and testing processes to help local school communities develop capacities for undertaking continuous improvement. Teacher action research—research designed to uncover effective ways of dealing with real-world problems—also continues into this contract period and builds on AEL's 10 years of experience in the area. Groups of practicing teachers use research methods to investigate a problem or issue significant to their individual teaching.

AEL also supports applied research and development studies in rural education. AEL develops products and support-mechanisms that enable rural schools and communities to help students enter school ready to learn, master challenging core academic subject, matter and relate their schooling to successful adult roles.

Finally, AEL is continuing its highly acclaimed, five-year study of the implementation of the Kentucky Education Reform Act. The work is intended to analyze the effects on rural school districts of large-scale changes in state policy.

AEL provides a wide variety of research- and development-based information and assistance to educators and others across the region. A comprehensive School Services Center is accessible toll-free by telephone, or electronically through e-mail or fax. The Center provides free searches of the ERIC database, access to specialized periodicals, research syntheses, and online searchable databases of hot topic subject files, training opportunities and technical assistance providers, and state and regional directories of promising practices and programs.

Specialty Area: Rural Education. AEL provides leadership for programmatic research and development activities that inform efforts to improve education in rural communities. Two projects are planned. One consists of activities designed to improve school readiness of preschool children, school-to-work opportunities of secondary students, and academic achievement of all students. A novel strategy of this effort is the formation of a national academy of rural practitioners and researchers who engage with each other through topical listservs, National Rural Education Association symposia, and video reports. The second consists of activities designed to inform the debate about rural education. Products resulting from this effort include an annual paper addressing emerging rural education issues, an electronic journal, and a rural education digest.

Recent Accomplishments. Established in 1966, AEL is governed by a 28-member Board of Directors whose members include representatives from the region's state departments of education, key education professionals, and non-educators interested in education. AEL has developed high-quality research and development projects and products to deliver professional development, promote family literacy, increase parental involvement and assist school districts, departments of education and decisionmakers. AEL's professional development program *QUILT—Questioning and Understanding to Improve Learning and Thinking*—has gained national prominence through acceptance into the National Diffusion Network. *Family Connections*, the AEL-developed series of weekly guides for parents, is now being used in 45 states and is available to more than 60,000 families nationwide.

Southeastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE)

Main Address:	Post Office Box 5367 Greensboro, NC 27435 Phone: (910) 334-3211 Fax: (910) 334-3268 (800) 755-3277 E-mail: info@SERVE.org Internet: http://www.serve.org
Director:	Dr. Roy H. Forbes
OERI Contact:	Deborah Williams (202) 219-2204; deborah_williams@ed.gov
States Served:	Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina

SERVE Regional Offices:

Executive Services, Evaluation, Research and Development, Operations—
Greensboro, NC Office
Post Office Box 5367
Greensboro, North Carolina 27435-5367
Phone: (910) 334-3211 Fax: (910) 334-3268
(800) 755-3277

Publications, Eisenhower Math and Science Consortium—
Tallahassee, FL Office
345 South Magnolia Drive, Suite D23
Tallahassee, Florida 32301
Phone: (904) 671-6000 Fax: (904) 671-6020
(800) 352-6001

Clearinghouse
Phone: (800) 352-3747
Electronic Mail: (800) 487-7605

Math and Science Consortium
Phone: (904) 671-6033 Fax: (904) 671-6010
(800) 854-0476

Technology, Field Services—
Atlanta, GA Office
41 Marietta Street, NW, Suite 1000
Atlanta, Georgia 30303
Phone: (404) 577-7737 Fax: (404) 577-7812
(800) 659-3204
SERVE-Line (Modem only)
(404) 577-7641 (800) 487-7605

Delta Project—
Cleveland, MS Office
Delta State University, P.O. Box 3183
Cleveland, Mississippi 38733
Phone: (601) 846-4384 Fax: (601) 846-4402
(800) 326-4548

Policy Offices—
Montgomery, AL Office
Alabama Department of Education
50 North Ripley Street
Gordon Person Building
Montgomery, AL 36130
Phone: (334) 242-9758 Fax: (334) 242-9708

Atlanta, GA Office
State Department of Education
2054 Twin Towers East
Atlanta, GA 30334
Phone: (404) 656-2598 Fax: (404) 651-8737

Jackson, MS Office
State Department of Education
P.O. Box 771
Jackson, MS 39201
Phone: (601) 359-3512 Fax: (601) 359-3242

Raleigh, NC Office
Department of Public Instruction
Education Building
301 N. Wilmington Street
Raleigh, NC 27601-2825
Phone: (919) 715-1244 Fax: (919) 715-0764

Columbia, SC Office
South Carolina Dept. of Education
1008 Rutledge Building
1429 Senate Street
Columbia, SC 29201
Phone: (803) 734-4110 Fax: (803) 734-3389

FY 1996 Funding: $5.6 million

Mission. To improve educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast.

Applied Research and Development. SERVE's region-wide applied research and development program builds the capacity of schools and districts to assess their needs and progress toward improvement goals. The research and development program consists of six projects, all focused on engaging partner schools, districts, and states in developing products and services that recognize local responsibility for monitoring the success of educational practices.

SERVE works with selected districts to:

- develop meaningful indicators of school progress;
- pilot and refine a self-assessment process for high schools;
- pilot new teacher evaluation approaches that support professional growth; and
- pilot professional development opportunities for teachers to develop classroom assessment approaches that guide students toward challenging goals.

Additionally, SERVE organizes regional study groups to consider issues involved in "scaling up" innovative programs and practices that are taking root in the region to make them more broadly available. Study groups look at successful programs in the areas of curriculum, school-district management, and intervention for at-risk students.

Finally, SERVE forms partnerships for research and development efforts at the state level with each state in the region. In North Carolina, a study of site-based management is being written, and will be disseminated, and discussed at a regional meeting of state department representatives. In South Carolina, in partnership with the state department of education and the national Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University, SERVE is providing resources to consider the impact of a state initiative to provide intensive assistance to identified schools. Collaborative projects with the other four states in the region will follow.

Specialty Area: Early Childhood Education. SERVE is developing expertise and the ability to provide leadership and support to the early childhood community nationwide by establishing a resource and referral system. Initially staff will conduct a national assessment, using the Laboratory network and other sources, to identify critical needs. From this information, SERVE will

- establish a research agenda (identify research sites for data collection and development activities);
- design, develop, and disseminate products, publications, training programs, and technical assistance activities, including meetings and symposia; and
- strive to influence national policy development.

Recent Accomplishments. Established in 1990, SERVE has worked closely with schools, districts, and state partners trying to respond to their needs in a variety of ways. Through work with these partners, SERVE supported the development of high-quality products and services, some examples of which are:

- SERVE collaborated with the State Department of Mississippi to develop a state-wide school board training program. Initially, training was provided to 136 school board members from 88 of Mississippi's 150 districts. During the second year of the project, over 100 school board members received training; 125 were trained in year three. A publication highlighting the Mississippi program and describing related training efforts in the other five states was developed.
- SERVE developed with the University of South Carolina a model for improving remedial and compensatory education in rural school districts. Facilitated by SERVE, a group of 12 schools (over 130 educators) wrote school improvement plans and received technical assistance over two years related to implementation. As part of the Laboratory Network Program on Alternative Assessment, SERVE disseminated *Toolkits for Professional Developers: Alternative Assessment* to over 300 users.
- SERVE developed publications and training for informing teachers about classroom assessment methods that match higher standards for students. Initially, SERVE worked with 30 middle school science teachers in 9 schools to develop a resource for teachers to use to rethink the level of work they demand from their students.

- SERVE established partnerships with 10 schools to pilot formative teacher evaluation plans, which were shared with the region through a SERVE publication. Currently, over 100 schools in the region have adopted all or part of these formative plans.
- SERVE sponsored a multi-year study to identify barriers to school restructuring efforts culminated in the publication of two nationally-recognized documents. In a related effort, SERVE supported four schools and two districts in implementing Total Quality Management. A publication chronicles the three-year effort in these sites.

SERVE also has provided an important networking function in the region through the development of SERVE-Line, an electronic communication system with over 30,000 subscribers. Educators, especially teachers, have used SERVE-Line to collaborate and share resources, address educational issues, and overcome the isolation experienced in many rural areas.

Another valuable research dissemination service was the Database Information Services Clearinghouse (DISC), now freely accessible on the Internet. In responding to the 5,000 requests received to date, DISC provided educators with access to research-based information through a computerized search of the educational literature.

Finally, SERVE *Hot Topics* and *Sharing Success* publications summarized research and best practices in important program areas and were widely disseminated. Over 100,000 *Hot Topics* and 20,000 *Sharing Success* publications were disseminated.

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)

Address:	1900 Spring Road, Suite 300 Oak Brook, IL 60521-1480 Phone: (630) 571-4700 Fax: (630) 571-4716 (800) 356-2735 E-mail: info@ncrel.org Internet: http://www.ncrel.org
Director:	Dr. Jeri Nowakowski
OERI Contact:	Mary Campbell (202) 219-2130; mary_campbell@ed.gov
States Served:	Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin

FY 1996 Funding: $6.6 million

Mission. To apply research and development to strengthen and support schools and communities in systemic change so that all students achieve standards of educational excellence. NCREL will accomplish its mission through dissemination, policy analysis, technical assistance, and by leveraging the power of partnerships and networks.

Applied Research and Development. NCREL organizes its work in five centers:

- *Teaching and Learning Center.* This center is at the heart of NCREL's work. It collects information on teaching and learning and contributes to the research and development in these areas. Working with partners from R&D networks, Center staff support the leaders of schools engaged in systemic reform and disseminate the best learning research in innovative ways.
- *Center for School and Community Development.* This Center supports schools and communities as they undertake school development to improve learning. The Center identifies and organizes research and models of best practice to help schools and communities improve their planning, decision-making, and practices so that students achieve at high levels. The Center also provides technical assistance, training, and consulting services.
- *Center for Scaling Up.* This Center seeks ways to "scale up" innovation and systemic reform to reach every classroom in the region. The Center works to build knowledge about how to scale up practices and programs that work and to implement those strategies. Center activities are intended to increase understanding of the nature of reform and the factors associated with replicating promising and proven practices.
- *Evaluation and Policy Information Center.* By providing evaluation and policy analysis services to support systemic reform, this Center reflects NCREL's belief that inquiry is a vital element of the Laboratory's work. To carry out its work, the Center develops networks of researchers and research users, monitors and tracks state and local reform efforts, conducts rapid-response inquiries that inform and influence policy-making on "hot" education issues, provides resources for state policy seminars and studies, and holds online policy seminars.

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- *Technology for Educational Achievement Center.* Born of NCREL's belief that technology is a powerful tool for schools and communities, this Center takes the lead in examining the potentials and limitations of current and emerging technologies to promote more effective teaching and learning. The Center also examines critical policy issues that must be addressed in applying technologies in educational settings.

Specialty Area: **Educational Technology.** As a leader in educational technology, NCREL is establishing a national Forum on Educational Technology that will serve both as a policy "think tank" to create an extensive knowledge base in this area and as an "interface" for potential users of this knowledge base. The knowledge base created by the Forum will contain information about current and alternative policies and their consequences as well as information gleaned from the experiences of state, regional, and local entities as they implement technology programs and formulate technology policies. Participants of this Forum may include policymakers at all levels, educators, school and district administrators, technology developers, telecommunications providers, colleges and universities, and education agencies. Initially, the Forum will focus on five policy domains:

- providing universal access to technology systems;
- integrating technologies into curricula;
- monitoring and stimulating the development of new technology innovations;
- establishing communities of practice and partnerships; and
- examining regulatory and management issues.

Recent Accomplishments. A leader in the study and use of technology in education, NCREL was a pioneer with the Public Broadcasting System in using satellites to deliver video-based professional development programs. In the past five years, NCREL produced 22 programs as a part of five series, all delivered free via PBS satellite to the more than 23,000 public and private schools in NCREL's region. A three-time Telly Award winner, NCREL is continuing to produce educational programs.

NCREL's most recent technology-based resource, the *Pathways to School Improvement* Internet site, is designed to help school teams in their efforts to improve education. *Pathways* represents the best in research and practice from NCREL and the other nine regional educational laboratories, as well as research and development centers nationwide. Other recent accomplishments include:

- *Urban Principals Academies.* Designed to provide ongoing support and training to improve urban schools, the academies have been providing intensive leadership programs for hundreds of principals and administrators since 1992.
- •*Strategic Teaching and Reading Project (STRP).* This research-based instructional improvement and professional development project provides a framework to improve teaching and learning for grades K–12. Since 1991, educators in more than 100 urban and rural schools across the Midwest have implemented strategic teaching through this project. Studies show that STRP makes a difference in how well children read.
- *Timely publications on emerging issues.* NCREL's *Policy Briefs* have responded to the need for timely information on "hot topics" in education. A 1993 issue on "Charter Schools" has had a national distribution of more than 110,000 copies. In 1995, more than 20,000 copies of *Plugging In*, a publication on choosing and using educational technology, were distributed nationally.

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL)

Address:	211 East Seventh Street Austin, TX 78701-3281 Phone: (512) 476-6861 Fax: (512) 476-2286 (800) 476-6861 E-mail: jpollard@sedl.org Internet: http://www.sedl.org
Director:	Dr. Preston C. Kronkosky
OERI Contact:	Gil Garcia (202) 219-2144; gil_garcia@ed.gov
States Served:	Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas

FY 1996 Funding: $5.5 million

Mission. SEDL exists to challenge, support, and enrich educational systems in providing quality education for all learners. The mission of the Laboratory is to find, share, and sustain effective solutions for urgent problems facing educational systems, practitioners, and decisionmakers in the southwestern United States. SEDL's particular emphasis is to ensure educational equality for children and youth who live in poverty; who are Hispanic, black, or other minorities; or who have mental or physical disabilities.

Applied Research and Development. The role of SEDL's applied research, development, and dissemination is to help groups engaged in school improvement build the capacity to identify and address their own needs relative to the education of their children. Toward this end, SEDL provides tested and proven strategies, tools, and products from which communities can draw. In this way, "solutions" to education reform needs can be researched and developed in partnership with people in the field at selected levels that range from the statehouse to the classroom.

SEDL's work under the current laboratory contract is organized around the following six goals, each with one or more projects involving research, development, and dissemination. These include:

- enhancing family and community involvement in education;
- addressing diversity in language and culture;
- aligning and supporting policy development;
- making instructional systems coherent;
- applying technologies to restructuring and learning; and
- changing the organization and management of schooling.

Specialty Area: Language and Cultural Diversity. During the five-year contract, SEDL will conduct research, discuss, observe, synthesize, and network to address the educational needs of an increasingly diverse language-minority student population. Some of the issues surrounding language and culture diversity in education include the following:

- characteristics of schools that are particularly effective in improving outcomes for students;
- key factors and processes for building an effective teaching and learning environment;

- effective competencies and behaviors of school staff and how to develop them;
- native language development, preservation, instruction;
- effective means of ensuring student access to a high-quality curriculum;
- valid assessment methods and effects of alternative assessment procedures; and
- ways of engaging parents and communities in education.

SEDL also documents the development of an emerging binational school program jointly sponsored by the New Mexico State Department of Education and its partner agency in the State of Chihuahua, Mexico. SEDL contributes to what we know about adapting schools to local community contexts. Other networking activities and forums will engage educators and policy makers in discussions to clarify issues and point to possible solutions to the challenges facing American Indians. SEDL's distribution activities help keep educators and the public informed about new knowledge, issues, and trends in the field.

Recent Accomplishments. *The Leadership for Change* Project is a series of studies carried out during the past five years to increase understanding of the skills and characteristics needed by school leaders who attempt large-scale change, especially in programs for at-risk children, and to apply that understanding to the development of effective training materials and procedures. SEDL researchers describe school improvement as a progression of stages: getting started, maintaining momentum, and fostering a climate conducive to change. Leadership strategies in the earliest stage of school reform initiatives include learning from other schools and from effective practice, deciding between partial and school-wide change, developing a common vision, and preparing staff for problems to come. Effective leaders learn to share leadership and to set aside time from regular school tasks and schedules so that staff can collaborate in planning and solving problems.

The Border Colloquy is an ambitious international program to develop a shared understanding of the perceptions and concerns regarding regional education issues among key policymakers and educators on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, or "La Frontera." With support from SEDL staff, education policymakers from New Mexico and Texas have worked with their counterparts in four Mexican states to create a shared vision for the education and well-being of children and youth in the border region. That partnership has resulted in the development of a unique plan of action for the improvement of educational services—including professional development and key exchanges of staff and information resources to maintain high-quality teaching and learning—for all students along the border.

Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL)

Address:	2550 South Parker Road, Suite 500 Aurora, Colorado 80014-1678 Phone: (303) 337-0990 Fax: (303) 337-3005 E-mail: info@mcrel.org Internet: http://www.mcrel.org
Director:	Dr. J. Timothy Waters
OERI Contact:	Annora Bryant (202) 219-2087; annora_bryant@ed.gov
States Served:	Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming

FY 1996 Funding: $4.2 million

Mission. To work with its clients to improve the quality of educational policy and practice by applying the best available knowledge from research, development, and experience. Guided by a Board of Directors whose members represent regional interests and constituencies–including Chief State School Officers, state legislators, educators, and business and community members–McREL promotes knowledge-based school improvement to help all students meet high standards and to help the nation meet the National Education Goals by stimulating sustainable systemic change at the local and state levels. In carrying out its mission, McREL helps local and state practitioners and administrators "put the pieces of educational reform together" and "scale up" systemic reform to encompass all students, schools, levels of educational administration, and programmatic areas across educational contexts.

Applied Research and Development. McREL's comprehensive and collaborative development and applied research agenda is designed to create tools and strategies to facilitate systemic reform that meets the needs of all children. The four programs of research include projects that:

- help states and school districts identify and implement standards, curriculum, assessment, and instructional strategies based on needs and the research on best practice;
- identify human development and motivation factors that advance learning, instruction, and systemic change;
- develop strategies and tools that enhance organizations' capacity to learn; and
- add to our knowledge about how the various components of educational systems interact to affect systemic reform efforts.

Implementation of these four research programs is in full partnership with stakeholders in each of the seven states in the region. Field sites in each state represent a long-term investment by the Laboratory to create a variety of systemic reform tools, processes, and strategies to meet the needs of schools. Research plans are created by a Regional Research Team composed of McREL staff and a researcher from each of the seven states. All research relates to McREL's specialty area of curriculum, learning and instruction, as well as the process of school change.

McREL's broad set of field services is designed to "scale up" systemic reform and provide direct assistance to collaborating state and local agencies. Similar to the Regional Research Team, a Regional Field Services Team develops a field services plan based both on the needs of each individual state and the cross-cutting needs of the region. Field service activities include: developing publications, technology networks, databases, and distance education networks; convening meetings and special working groups; and training, technical assistance, and information and resource dissemination. McREL also leads regional efforts to form a nationwide education information and assistance system and convenes regional technical assistance providers to develop and implement a plan to share resources and services regionally and through the nationwide system. As a member of the Laboratory Network Program, McREL plans activities that rely on the collective expertise of all the Regional Laboratories to develop and deliver products and processes that benefit education.

Evaluation is an integral component of McREL's work by assessing the progress and impact of the Laboratory throughout the contract period. The primary goals of self-assessment are to determine which interventions succeed in improving education and achieving desired student outcomes, and to assess the Laboratory's effectiveness in fostering systemic change. In order to remain responsive to regional needs, McREL conducts assessments throughout the contract period.

Specialty Area: Curriculum, Learning and Instruction. To provide national leadership in curriculum, learning, and instruction, McREL is building on its prior efforts to synthesize and align standards developed by various professional groups across the nation. The Laboratory develops and disseminates resource materials, monitors and synthesizes research literature, provides staff development sessions, sponsors conferences and workshops, presents information at regional and national forums, and develops partnerships with ED-funded institutions and service providers nationwide.

Recent Accomplishments. McREL, a national leader in adapting and implementing content standards, has developed a model for tracking standards and benchmarks in the subject areas identified in the National Goals, including science, mathematics, history, geography, the arts, language arts, and health. McREL has also been tracking the development of standards in thinking and reasoning, and has analyzed the knowledge and skills considered important for the workplace. School districts and states have been using McREL's work—which is available online through the Internet—in developing and reviewing their own standards.

WestEd

Uniting the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development (FWL) and the Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL)

Address:	730 Harrison Street San Francisco, CA 94107 Phone: (415) 565-3000 Fax: (415) 565-3012 E-mail: tross@wested.org Internet: http://www.wested.org
Director:	Dr. Dean H. Nafziger
OERI Contact:	Sharon Horn (202) 219-2203; sharon_horn@ed.gov
States Served:	Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah

FY 1996 Funding: $5.5 million

Mission. To challenge and enable educators to provide quality learning for all students by applying the best available knowledge from research, development and experience. In carrying out its mission, WestEd will work with clients to develop the tools, processes and materials that policymakers and practitioners need to better put the pieces of reform together and to scale up successful practice in ways that will improve teaching and learning for a broader range of students.

Applied Research and Development. WestEd is engaged in an array of initiatives including "whole school reform," language and cultural diversity, and early intervention. *Whole School Reform* seeks to develop better ways for schools to transform themselves from a collection of programs into coherent, continuously improving organizations concerned with quality. It focuses on developing a school support strategy that uses assessment to change the culture of the school system, and co-developing or adapting and implementing three Johns Hopkins University school improvement models: Talent Development Schools, Success for All, and Roots and Wings. *Language and Cultural Diversity* seeks to enhance the systemic and collaborative capacity of teachers, school systems and communities to reshape school structures and culture to equitably serve our increasing number of diverse students. It focuses on adaptive professional development strategies and a model support system for paraprofessionals. *Early Intervention, Care and Education* seeks to integrate the education community with other social services agencies, private organizations, community groups, and family members in planning and delivering comprehensive services for at-risk families.

Specialty Area: Assessment and Accountability. Focusing on assessment as a vehicle for whole school reform, WestEd works with other regional laboratories to design and develop a far-reaching program of development and applied research aimed at helping schools use valid and reliable assessment tools not only to measure but to improve student performance. In providing national leadership on critical assessment and accountability issues, WestEd focuses on four key areas: whole school implementation; school-to-work transition; teacher assessment and certification; and development and use of scoring rubrics.

Recent Accomplishments. Established in 1966, both FWL and SWRL have developed high-quality research and development projects and products in school improvement processes, developed new knowledge and tools, acted as a catalyst for change, and disseminated the best available knowledge from research and experience.

- Drawing on proven practices in medicine and law, FWL has pioneered the use of cases—vivid teacher-written accounts of real classroom dilemmas—in professional development. Used to catalyze discussion and reflection in both preservice and inservice settings, the case approach is proving to be a powerful tool in bridging the gap between what teachers learn at the university and what they experience on the job. Evaluation of our math cases, for example, found not only statistically significant gains in mathematics knowledge but improved instructional practice.
- FWL's nationally acclaimed *Infant/Toddler Caregiver Training Program* teaches professional caregivers how to provide nurturing and educationally stimulating environments for their charges. Research-based videos and print materials are available in Spanish, Chinese, and English. The training covers infant/toddler social-emotional development, caregiving routines, language development, and working with parents. Eight thousand caregivers have been trained in California, and the program has been disseminated across the nation.
- FWL's publication series of *Policy Briefs* and *Updates* has provided state and local policy makers with timely, research-based information to help them make sound decisions on such key educational issues as charter schools, site-based management, time and learning and school-college collaborations.
- FWL has helped linguistically diverse schools adapt the nationally-recognized *Success for All* program. Developed at Johns Hopkins, the program uses a whole school approach to ensure that all children in high-poverty schools master reading. Adapting the model for Spanish-speaking students, SWRL recorded significant gains in student performance.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL)

Address:	101 SW Main Street, Suite 500 Portland, OR 97204 Phone: (503) 275-9500 Fax: (503) 275-9489 (800)547-6339 E-mail: info@nwrel.org Internet: http://www.nwrel.org
Director:	Dr. Ethel Simon-McWilliams
OERI Contact:	Carol Mitchell (202) 219-2128; carol_j._mitchell@ed.gov
States Served:	Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington

FY 1996 Funding: $5.2 million

Mission. To improve educational results for children, youth, and adults by providing research and development assistance in delivering equitable, high-quality educational programs. NWREL provides research and development assistance to education, government, community agencies, business and labor.

Applied Research and Development. NWREL focuses on comprehensive school improvement strategies, building on its solid, long-term relationships with Northwest schools and communities. Development and applied research on four priority topics—assessment and accountability, early childhood education, rural education, and school change processes—results in resources that support comprehensive school reform and improvement strategies for local schools and communities. Development efforts are concentrated at school-community partnership sites that serve high concentrations of economically-disadvantaged children in both urban and rural areas. NWREL conducts a broad array of information and assistance to educators, policy makers, and the public to support widespread educational improvement efforts across the Northwest region.

Assessment and Accountability. NWREL is developing a comprehensive system to identify, define, manage, interpret, and report educational information as a cohesive set of school and community indicators, with related resources, training, and technical assistance to support implementation and maintenance.

Early Childhood Education. NWREL is developing processes and resources for schools to establish classroom environments that are developmentally and culturally appropriate for young children. NWREL also has developed a self-study process, resource materials, and training to help teams from schools and agencies in local communities to plan and improve comprehensive services available to children and families.

Rural Education. NWREL is developing a process and related tools to enable members of rural communities to carry out school improvement efforts they plan and implement themselves.

School Change Processes. NWREL is developing strategies and tools to enable school-district-community systems to change their school cultures so that all students achieve high standards consistent with what their communities value.

Specialty Area: **School Change Processes.** NWREL is bringing together practitioners, policymakers, assistance providers, researchers, program leaders, and others to learn more about the processes for changing schools that enable all students to achieve to high standards. Through its work in this specialty area, NWREL expects to increase the focus of school change efforts on learning success for all students; elevate the quality of development and applied research in the area of school change; develop practical, field-oriented tools and strategies; and encourage collaboration that brings key stakeholders together locally, regionally, and nationally. NWREL's activities include:

- supporting development, applied research, and dissemination resulting in tools and strategies that support school change;
- providing national leadership by convening experts from across the country to address issues in school change; by establishing school change networks of researchers, practitioners and others; and by synthesizing knowledge about trends, policies and progress in school change processes;
- providing research expertise and professional development to benefit and enhance the work of the laboratory network in making real change in schools; and
- supporting and developing strong partnerships among ED-funded programs to share information and identify potential collaborative efforts in school change.

Recent Accomplishments. During the past five years, NWREL conducted 22,733 training and technical assistance activities involving 164,733 participants, ranging from one-to-one consultations to large regional conferences. During the same time, requests were filled for 63,623 copies of NWREL-developed products, such as curriculum materials and training handbooks, and 5,835 copies of reports and information documents. Examples of these training and technical assistance and resource dissemination activities include the following:

School Change Processes. NWREL has developed, and continues to disseminate, the nationally-validated *Onward to Excellence* (OTE) program. The 10-step, research-based school improvement process engages an entire school staff in using effective schooling research to improve student performance. Over the past 14 years, OTE has been used by over 2,000 schools throughout the United States.

Assessment. A NWREL study of effective methods of teaching students to write well, which began five years ago in three Oregon classrooms, has now resulted in training for more than 70,000 teachers in 18 states. Teachers participating in the NWREL training, Creative Writers: Classroom Applications of Writing Assessment, gain skills in using a six-trait analytic model for teaching writing. Evaluation results show that students improved their performance on writing exams, and they performed better than students in a control group; the impact was consistent across all ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

Rural Education. NWREL work has shown that a number of incremental steps can facilitate change and improve the likelihood of success in delivering effective multi-age classroom instruction in small schools in isolated communities. This work has been the basis for NWREL development of resources and technical assistance to schools implementing multi-age instruction.

Early Childhood Education. NWREL has worked closely with schools and social service agencies to explore and develop effective practices to meet the needs of young children and their families, based primarily on two approaches: (1) enhancement of developmentally and culturally appropriate practices and (2) integration of education, health and social services. NWREL examined both research and actual practices at school-community partnership sites and has developed assistance programs that can help to effectively integrate education and social service delivery.

Pacific Region Educational Laboratory (PREL)

Address:	828 Fort Street Mall, Suite 500 Honolulu, HI 96813-4321 Phone: (808) 533-6000 Fax: (808) 533-7599 E-mail: askprel@prel.hawaii.edu Internet: http://prel-oahu-1.prel.hawaii.ed
Director	Dr. John W. Kofel
OERI Contact:	Joe Wilkes (202) 219-2186; joe_wilkes@ed.gov
Region Served:	American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap), Guam, Hawaii, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau

FY 1996 Funding: $3 million

Mission. PREL will assist education, government, community agencies, businesses, and labor groups to maintain cultural literacy and improve the quality of life by helping to strengthen educational programs and processes for children, youth, and adults.

Applied Research and Development. PREL conducts its applied research and development (R&D) activities through a "practitioner as researcher" model that was used successfully during the previous laboratory contract. A regionally representative "R&D Cadre" comprised of educators from public, private, and higher education function as a "leadership team" throughout all phases of the planned R&D activities. The Cadre provides invaluable insight into local contexts, cultural variance, and best methodologies to be employed. At the same time, the Cadre helps PREL bridge enormous distances to ensure that isolated locations and costly travel can be overcome while conducting high-quality R&D.

Outcomes of PREL's R&D agenda are the continued development of the R&D Cadre, a Pacific-based group of practitioners that understands and can conduct quality applied research and development; as well as a focus on regional and local research and development priorities. In addition, PREL's Board of Directors plays an essential role in setting R&D priorities, monitoring work in progress, and guiding the application of R&D findings.

PREL R&D activities address the Laboratory's assigned specialty area—language and cultural diversity. This will be particularly true for the Pacific area, but PREL also contributes to the national perspective on language and cultural diversity issues.

PREL's direct services to the field will build on the applied R&D program of work, helping to "leverage" resources to achieve the greatest possible impact.

Specialty Area: Language and Cultural Diversity. As one of three laboratories assigned the specialty area of "language and cultural diversity," PREL works closely with the Northeast and Islands Laboratory at Brown University (LAB) and the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) to develop a comprehensive, complementary program of research and development in this area. While its work in this collaborative effort is particularly focused on the Pacific context, PREL also will help advance the nation's capacity to address language and cultural diversity needs and issues.

Recent Accomplishments. PREL has an impressive set of accomplishments to build upon as a result of the previous regional laboratory contract. A regional network of PREL leadership teams has been developed and is fully functioning, including the Board of Directors and R&D Cadre. Solid partnerships have allowed for access and involvement that are essential to quality, responsive work.

PREL's R&D Cadre has conducted the first Pacific-based studies in modern times. These include original work on school finance and facilities, access to learning opportunities, cultural learning, at-risk children and youth, school profiling, and needs assessment. These studies lay the groundwork for future work over the next five years.

PREL has helped develop access to and use of technology throughout the region. A local area network (LAN) within the laboratory and a connection with the Internet through the University of Hawaii are fully functioning. This technology has been used to assist Pacific departments of education use technology for the first time to link with important sources of information and improve communication. PREL has helped design, install, train, and support local area networks and Internet connections in American Samoa, Kosrae, Pohnpei, Palau, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas. All other departments of education are in the process of being assisted to come on line as well.

PREL annually convenes a "Pacific Education Conference" in cooperation with the region's educational community. Now in its 12th year, the conference is the largest gathering of Pacific educators with an average attendance of approximately 1,200. The three-day venue involves delegations from each entity in an average of 150 different workshops on wide ranging topics. In excess of 9 percent of the presentations are made by Pacific educators. Pre- and post-conference institutes allow more in-depth work in selected topics. The PREL conference has become "the" educational event in the Pacific, and will continue to be held every year.

Regional Educational Laboratory Map 1995–2000

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